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# Lt General Ravindra Thodge's brainchild closes first deal to boost defence production in Nagpur

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NAGPUR: Vidarbha Defence Industrial Hub (VDIH), a not-for-profit company set up by former master general ordnance (MGO) Lt General (retd) Ravindra Thodge, who passed away last year, has recently facilitated its first major deal.

VDIH has helped broker an agreement between a Czech manufacturer and a Nagpur company to make components of powerpack units for armoured vehicles (tanks), said Dushyant Deshpande, VDIH convenor. The powerpack is a part of the tank's engine.

However, VDIH is not disclosing the company's name at present citing business reasons. An announcement would be made soon, said Deshpande.

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He added that the components were being imported by India until now. With the transfer of technology (TOT) agreement between the Czech and Indian company, the production will take place at home as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat programme of the government.

A new unit would be set up in the city with initial investment of Rs25 crore, to be eventually scaled up to Rs55 crore, said Deshpande. The plant is expected to be operational within the current financial year.

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VDIH was established by Thodge with the objective of promoting defence industries in the region. This is the first major deal struck with the help of VDIH, Deshpande said.

In a separate development, VDIH has facilitated an order to supply three prototype telescopic excavators by a Slovakian company to Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML). Mounted on Tatra vehicles, the excavators can be deployed for digging trenches from a distance and search operations, said Deshpande.

“Indo-Slovak Chamber of Commerce is a member of VDIH. A memorandum of understanding was signed between CSM group of Slovakia and BEML to provide technology for making telescopic excavators. Recently, the CSM Group has also bagged the order to supply three prototype excavators to BEML,” said Deshpande.

This is on no-cost, no-commitment basis, after which further orders may be placed. The excavators can be used by the army in border areas.

VDIH has 35 members including industries from Nagpur. It also had plans to set up a centre of excellence in Mihan. The centre was planned to create skilled manpower for aeronautical and defence industries. However, the project has been put on hold after the state government under Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) regime withheld its contribution towards capital.

The project will require Rs92 crore, out of which Rs63 crore were to come from the state government. As a part of cost cutting decisions during Covid, the government has put the plans on hold.